

NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office
St. Petersburg, FL

December 2004



The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office web site at www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete.

IMPORTANT REMINDER - REINSTATEMENT OF DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION The deadline to apply for reinstatement of Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) for surviving spouses who were eligible for DIC and who remarried after age 57 and prior to December 16, 2003, is December 15, 2004. For information, call VA at 1-800-827-1000.

WHY DOESN'T MY NEW COMP RATE EQUAL MY OLD RATE PLUS 2.7 PERCENT? Every year about this time when the new compensation rates are announced we receive calls from veterans who think there has been a mistake in their new rate. They take their old rate and add the percent of increase, and then find the result is more than what the rate table shows. Unfortunately, the new compensation rates are not determined by simply adding the Cost of Living Adjustment to the old rates.

Title 38 United States Code (USC) Section 1114 specifies the rates of compensation for veterans without dependents. The legislation providing the Cost of Living Adjustment provides that the increase (2.7 percent) be applied to these rates and the results rounded down to the nearest dollar.

Title 38 USC Section 1115 specifies additional compensation for dependents of veterans with total disability. The legislation providing the Cost of Living Adjustment provides that the increase (2.7 percent) be applied to these rates and the results rounded down to the nearest whole dollar.

For veterans with disabilities of 30 percent or more but less than total, Title 38 USC Section 1115 provides that the additional amounts for dependents shall be the additional amount for total disability times the percent of disability, rounded down to the nearest whole dollar.

To summarize: Title 38 specifies the compensation rates for veterans without dependents and additional amounts for dependents for veterans with total disability. The COLA is applied to these rates, rounding down to the nearest whole dollar. For veterans rated 30 percent or more but less than total, the additional amounts for dependents are determined

by taking the percent of the rating times the additional amount for dependents for a veteran with total disability, and rounding down to the nearest whole dollar. It's the rounding down that causes the rate to be less than what it would be if the new rate was just the old rate plus the COLA.

VETERANS' NEW ID CARDS HELP BATTLE IDENTITY THEFT (VA News Release November 4, 2004)

WASHINGTON – With identity theft as the major fraud reported by Americans in 2003, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has designed a new identity card for veterans that will safeguard confidential information. The card, formally known as the Veterans Identification Card (VIC), will have veterans' photos on the front and identify them as enrollees in the VA's health care system. The card includes the words "service connected" under the photo if the veteran has a service-connected disability.

Veterans should request the new card at their local VA medical centers. Processing will take five to seven days once eligibility is verified. VA hopes to complete the conversion to the new, safer card by mid-November. The existing cards will remain valid until veterans receive their new cards.

VA IMPROVES "My HealthVet" WEB SITE (VA News Release November 19, 2004) WASHINGTON – Harnessing the power of the Internet, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is improving its Web-based system for providing health care information to its patients. Under the latest improvement to VA's "My HealthVet" Web site, veterans will be able to update personal information and record medical data such as prescriptions. A new capability now added to the site allows veterans to record their personal information and medical data – including emergency contacts, health care providers and insurance, prescriptions, tests and allergies – in a private, secure Internet environment. Eventually, veterans will be able to receive their medical records from VA online. Another new feature will be a "Learn About" tab, which will lead veterans to a variety of topics in health education. VA launched My HealthVet on Veterans Day 2003. The site is located on the Internet at www.myhealth.va.gov.

OPERATION DEAR ABBY The idea for "Operation Dear Abby" started in 1967 when Sgt. Billy Thompson wrote advice columnist "Dear Abby" to tell her that 100,000 South Vietnamese orphans needed help. He also mentioned that a wonderful Christmas present for our armed forces personnel would be "just a letter from home." When "Dear Abby" readers saw the letter, the response was overwhelming. That was the start of what the United States Department of Defense has dubbed "Operation Dear Abby," in which letters addressed to "Any Servicemember" were distributed to the troops. But, in the current situation, security concerns about regular mail delivery have prompted the military to suspend the letter-writing campaign.

However, "Dear Abby," the U.S. Department of Defense, and the U.S. Department of the Navy's *LifeLines2000* Services Network is providing a private and secure online resource at <http://anyservicemember.navy.mil/> that will allow sending a Sailor, Marine, Soldier, Airman, or Coast Guardsman a holiday greeting or message of support. Service members with internet access may read those messages via 'OperationDearAbby.Net'. Company commanders who have internet access have the ability to download bulk messages to be printed and distributed according to service branch and location to service members who do not have internet access.

VA ANNOUNCES FUNDING FOR GULF WAR

ILLNESSES (VA News Release November 12, 2004)
WASHINGTON – Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi announced up to \$15 million in additional research funding for Gulf War illnesses. The funding commitment represents the department's single largest set-aside of research funding for a specific area of investigation and could constitute up to nearly 20 percent of VA's new research grant awards for FY 2005. Over the past decade, VA has spent more than \$50 million for research into Gulf War illnesses, and much of that work is still ongoing.

The 11-member committee, formally known as the "Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Illnesses," was appointed by Secretary Principi in January 2002. Although the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is still examining the committee's detailed, 143-page report, Secretary Principi said he is convinced there is sufficient justification for further scientific research.

IMPORTANT DATES IN DECEMBER

December 1 payments for November due

December 6 last day to change address or establish direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 12-30-2004 payments

December 15 last day for DIC widows who remarried after age 57 and prior to 12-16-2003 to apply for reinstatement of DIC

December 20 last day to change or cancel direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 12-30-2004 payments

December 24 Federal Holiday - Christmas Day

December 30 payments for December due

December 31 Federal Holiday - New Year Day

VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:

VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg - PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731 **1-800-827-1000**

Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA (education claims) - PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022

1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)

Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications

1-877-823-2378

Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline (medical care) - **1-877-222-8387**

VA EFT Information Hotline (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) **1-877-838-2778**

VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia (VA Insurance) - PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 **1-800-669-8477**

VA Health Administration Center (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) -

CHAMPVA inquiries: PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023

CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024

Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025 **1-800-733-8387**

Foreign Medical Program Office (medical treatment abroad) - PO Box 65021, Denver, CO 80206-5021 **303-331-7590**

National Cemeteries

10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL **727-398-9426**

6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 33513 **352-793-7740**

Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL **850-453-4108/4846**

National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs (headstones and markers) - 810 Vermont Ave NW, Washington, DC 20420 **1-800-697-6947**

Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center (certificates of eligibility)

PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120

1-888-244-6711

Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) Unit - Chicago VA Regional Office **1-800-829-4833**

INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:

VA Web Site: www.va.gov

VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS) <http://www.warms.vba.va.gov/>

Property Management www.ocwen.com

Florida Department of Veterans Affairs: www.floridavets.org/

St. Pete Regional Office: www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete

